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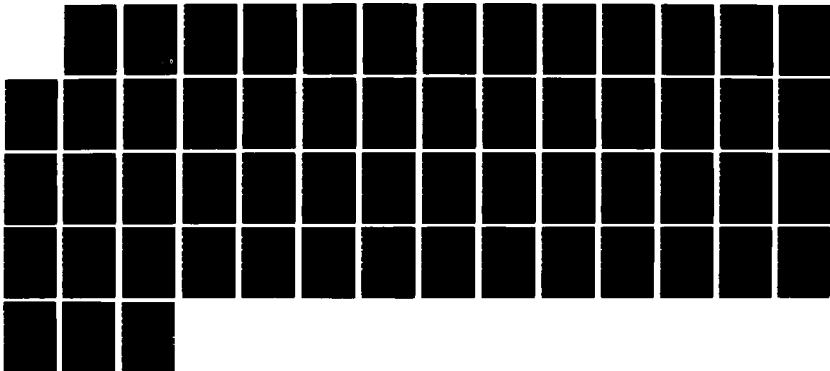
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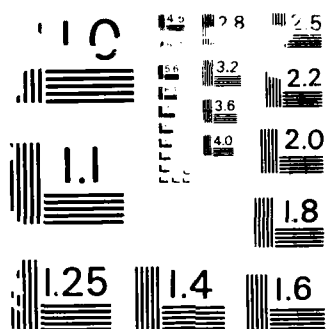
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BLIND MAN'S BLUFF?
A LOOK AT THE TACTICAL RECONNAISSANCE
CAPABILITIES OF THE U.S. ARMY'S LIGHT INFANTRY DIVISION

by

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The study concludes that HUMINT, especially tactical reconnaissance, is critical in executing low-intensity, combat operations such as counterinsurgency warfare. The division's tactical reconnaissance capability is limited and inadequate to meet its tactical intelligence gathering needs when employed in a counterinsurgency role. The LID's lack of adequate tactical reconnaissance assets raises serious doubts as to the ability of the LID to execute effectively a counterinsurgency mission. Similarly, the division's significant requirements for reconnaissance augmentation makes it questionable whether the Light Division has been optimized for the low-intensity arena.

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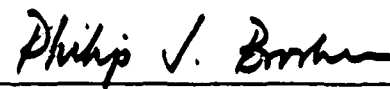
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ABSTRACT

BLIND MAN'S BLUFF? A LOOK AT THE TACTICAL RECONNAISSANCE CAPABILITIES OF THE U.S. ARMY'S LIGHT INFANTRY DIVISION by Major Albert Bryant Jr., USA, 49 pages.

The purpose of this monograph is to determine if the tactical reconnaissance capabilities of the U.S. Army's Light Infantry Division are sufficient to conduct counterinsurgency combat operations. The current light division was created to deal with low-intensity combat contingencies such as counterinsurgency warfare. By design, the division possesses limited intelligence gathering capability. Likewise, the division may be required to operate with austere support from corps and theater army. Within such an environment, forces conducting combat operations against guerrilla or light infantry forces must be employed efficiently to be effective. The key to that efficiency rests with the availability of timely and sufficient tactical intelligence.

The study begins by identifying the doctrinal tactical reconnaissance requirements associated with counterinsurgency combat operations. The capabilities of the light division with appropriate corps intelligence plugs are determined and analyzed with regard to mission requirements. U.S. experiences in conducting counterinsurgency combat operations during the Vietnam conflict are then reviewed to verify doctrinal reconnaissance requirements, to determine the effectiveness of U.S. tactical reconnaissance efforts and to assess their affect on combat operations. The capabilities of the light division are then compared to the requirements developed to identify shortcomings in the division's reconnaissance capabilities.

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Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
I. Introduction	1
II. Counterinsurgency Reconnaissance Requirements	5
III. Reconnaissance Capability of the LID	10
IV. Historical Perspective-U.S. Counterinsurgency Operations in Vietnam, 1966	18
V. Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations	35
Maps:	
1. Movement C/2-8 Inf 28 Oct 1966	41
2. Situation 0250 29 Oct 1966 C/2-8 Inf	42
3. 2-502d Inf Plan of attack - Phong Cao, RVN	43
Endnotes	44
Bibliography	47

1. INTRODUCTION

"Success with current army doctrine depends on our ability to identify or create and attack enemy weaknesses. To do this, commanders obtain information about the enemy--his strengths, vulnerabilities, locations, direction of attack, or area selected for defense, and his ability to conduct combat operations."

-- FM 100-5, Operations, 1982¹ --

Despite a common appreciation within the Army of the need to "see" the battlefield, reconnaissance stands as one of the most neglected subjects of the military art. Although each unit rotation at the National Training Center consistently highlights the fact that the winner of the reconnaissance/counterreconnaissance battle wins the maneuver fight, little has been said or written in recent years about the adequacy of reconnaissance capabilities within the Army's force structure. Within the heavy force structure, the intelligence community has developed a well integrated doctrinal and technical capability in support of corps, division, and brigade operations. Large scale, human tactical reconnaissance has, largely, been replaced by electronic devices capable of safely looking over the horizon for the commander. Yet, as the NTC graphically illustrates, there are no technical systems available today to provide the detailed, up-to-date combat information necessary to conduct low level tactical operations. That function must still be performed by a human scout.

The need for effective reconnaissance is especially important for the Army's newest unit, the "Light" Infantry Division or LID. In recognition of this, FC 71-101 Light Infantry Division Operations states the following:

*"The light infantry division must capitalize on enemy information more than any other division. If it is to be successful, it is imperative the enemy be thoroughly understood and that the division take advantage of every weakness."*²

Reconnaissance, as a part of the intelligence gathering system of the division, is critical to its combat effectiveness. Much has been written about the appropriateness of employing the LID in high-to low-intensity warfare, the adequacy of its organic firepower, and the austerity of its combat service support. Little has been said about the adequacy of its reconnaissance and intelligence structure and its effect on the division's combat effectiveness. The purpose of this study is to determine if the LID possesses sufficient tactical reconnaissance capability to be used as an effective combat force when employed to conduct counterinsurgency warfare, one of the low-intensity operations for which it was designed.

The term reconnaissance encompasses a wide range of activities designed to provide the information necessary for battle. FM 101-5-1, Operational Terms and Symbols, broadly defines reconnaissance as

"A mission undertaken to obtain information by visual observation or other detection methods, about the activities and resources of an enemy or potential enemy, or about the meteorologic, hydrologic, or geographic characteristics of a particular area."³

In his book, The Art of Reconnaissance, Brigadier General David Henderson divided all reconnaissance activities into three broad classes.⁴ The first class, protective reconnaissance, provides security for forces at all levels and consists of such activities as local patrolling, posting of observation posts, screens and guard operations. The second class, reconnaissance in force, employs large units to seek out and engage already identified enemy formations in an effort to gain contact with them and develop a more explicit knowledge of their strengths, deployments, and intentions. (FM 100-5, Operations, goes further in defining a reconnaissance in force as a form of offensive operation, linked more closely with an attack than reconnaissance in a pure sense.) Each of these forms of reconnaissance are routinely carried out by U.S. Army forces and fall outside the scope of this study.⁵

The third class of reconnaissance identified by BG Henderson might be termed "tactical reconnaissance." Tactical reconnaissance can be characterized as the employment of small patrols or scouting parties which seek to obtain information. They are not intended to fight but elude the enemy. The purpose of tactical reconnaissance is to provide the commander with the detailed information he requires to efficiently and decisively conduct the maneuver battle. It is this third type of reconnaissance operation that will serve as the focal point of this study.

Similarly, the scope of the study effort was narrowed to focus on the impact of reconnaissance on the LID's capability to conduct counterinsurgency combat operations.

During the past forty years, armed insurgencies have emerged as one of the most common forms of low-intensity conflict practiced worldwide. In response to the need for forces capable of meeting such low-intensity combat contingencies, the light infantry division was formed. In his 1984 White Paper, General Wickham, Army Chief of Staff, linked low-intensity operations with the light infantry division. Specifically cited was the need for a division sized force with the strategic mobility necessary for rapid introduction into potential trouble areas world wide.⁶ As such, it is reasonable to expect that the LID would be the force of choice if U.S. combat forces were deployed to conduct counterinsurgency combat operations. The presumption that the LID would be committed to combat operations if deployed into an insurgency theater is consistent with both current low-intensity doctrine as outlined in FC 100-20, Low-Intensity Conflict, and prevailing political inclinations.

FC 100-20 clearly enunciates the doctrinal conditions under which U.S. combat units would be introduced to aid in the suppression of an insurgency. The FC notes that a host nation is unlikely to request U.S. combat forces, even in small numbers, to avoid increasing its political and psychological vulnerability unless the threat has reached serious proportions. Should an insurgency grow beyond politically oriented opposition into organized, guerrilla warfare, U.S. assistance would focus on providing equipment, training and support to indigenous forces.

Troop support would normally be limited to specially trained, security assistance forces (e.g. Special Forces), combat support, and combat service support elements. Only when the insurgency has escalated to a war of movement beyond the coping ability of the host nation, would expanded U.S. assistance include selected and specially tailored combat forces.⁷ Doctrinally inherent, therefore, to the introduction of the LID into a counterinsurgency theater is the presumption that it is there to conduct combat operations. Likewise, the current political climate of the nation is such that employment of the division into a potentially hostile environment for any reason other than to conduct combat operations would be almost inconceivable. President Reagan stated as much in his 1987 statement of national strategic policy.

*"U.S. combat forces will be introduced into Low Intensity conflict situations only as a last resort and when vital national interests cannot otherwise be adequately protected."*⁸

While it is hoped that the strategic mobility and combat potential of the light infantry division will be sufficient to deter both the expansion of an embryonic insurgency and the intervention by other nations in support of insurgent forces, the utility of the LID must rest in its actual combat capability. Ultimately, the mission of any Army division is to successfully conduct combat operations should deterrence fail. Therefore, this study presumes that the LID, when deployed as part of a counterinsurgency force, will be required to conduct combat operations against an organized guerrilla force conducting a war of movement.

The study will begin by identifying the tactical reconnaissance requirements associated with counterinsurgency combat operations. The capabilities of the LID, with appropriate corps intelligence augmentation, shall then be determined and analyzed with regard to mission requirements. Selected U.S. counterinsurgency combat operations conducted during the Vietnam conflict are then reviewed to verify doctrinal recon requirements and to determine the effectiveness of U.S. combat operations in that environment.

Reconnaissance requirements will be compared with the capabilities of the LID to identify shortcomings in the division's recon capabilities. Finally, conclusions with regard to the light division's capability to meet its design objectives are stated and recommendations made to correct identified shortcomings.

II. COUNTERINSURGENCY RECONNAISSANCE REQUIREMENTS

"He who knows when he can fight and when he cannot will be victorious... Therefore I say: Know your enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril."

- The Art of War by Sun Tzu, 500 B.C.

As indicated by the centuries old appraisal by Sun Tzu, soldiers have long recognized the critical value of intelligence. To meet its intelligence needs, the U.S. Army has fielded an impressive array of intelligence gathering systems. For the most part, these systems were designed to meet the requirements of our most challenging and, potentially, dangerous mission, a mid- to high-intensity conflict in central Europe. By and large, the intelligence gathering capabilities of the LID are organized and equipped along the same lines as our forces in Europe. At issue, however, is the transferability of that intelligence structure to a low-intensity, counterinsurgency battlefield. Are there fundamental differences between conventional and counterinsurgency warfare that would cause differences in intelligence support requirements? Are our current collection means adequate to meet the requirements of counterinsurgency warfare?

The most significant differences between conventional and counterinsurgency warfare lie in the nature and tactics of enemy forces. Conventional warfare can be characterized as a direct struggle between two adversaries, who mutually seek battle in an effort to reach a decision. Battles are conducted by large units attempting to achieve decisive success by massing superior combat power against a portion of the enemy force. The command and control as well as logistical support requirements of such an effort

necessitate that subordinate unit movements and activities be structured in such a manner that mass can be achieved. In posturing for battle, therefore, a conventional force presents a recognizable signature which can be exploited by intelligence analysis techniques such as Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) or templating based on the location, identity, and capabilities of certain formations or critical specialty units. Insurgents, in contrast, do not attempt to achieve success by the operational massing of forces. Rather, they attempt to achieve success using decentralized, hit and run operations designed to weaken counterinsurgency forces while improving their own political and military strength. They purposely avoid the type of battlefield structure which would make them predictable and open to attack. The insurgent seeks to avoid battle except when it's to his advantage. In the interim, he attempts to "disappear," awaiting more favorable conditions. Habitually, insurgents operate in small groups, uniting briefly to form larger units to conduct operations. Subsequently, they disperse to avoid government reaction. Therefore, to gain the initiative, counterinsurgency forces must deny the guerrilla's ability to set the terms for battle by seeking out and destroying the dispersed elements of the guerrilla force in his base areas. Decentralized operations become the order of the day with the brigade serving as the primary echelon for tactical planning and execution.⁹ Higher echelon intelligence assets must, therefore, be focused to a far greater degree on meeting the specific tactical intelligence needs of widely dispersed brigades rather than focusing upon the intelligence requirements of their own echelon.¹⁰ In effect, corps and division assets must shift much of their focus from projections of future enemy intentions to the specifics of his current operations.

A second significant difference between conventional and insurgent warfare lies in the political nature of the battlefield environment. Conventional warfare is generally fought amidst a neutral population. While the civilian population rarely takes part in direct military action, its political loyalties are clearly and openly declared.¹¹ As a result, the military commander is free to

use his available combat power, guided only by military requirements and humanitarian concerns. In contrast, an insurgency is a political struggle in which only a portion of the population is fully committed to either the government's or the insurgent's cause. Much of the population is undecided. This necessitates limiting the application of military power. The need to win the hearts and minds of the uncommitted populace demands that military power be applied judiciously and with precision to avoid unnecessary death and damage to property. FC 100-20 summarizes this in saying:

*"Combat power must be applied in a manner that serves to reduce the overall scope, intensity, and duration of the insurgency. In particular, combat power must be applied selectively in order to minimize noncombatant casualties. Minimum essential force must be the guide."*¹²

While political considerations may dictate constraints on the use of combat power, it remains a military imperative that sufficient force be applied both to destroy the enemy and to protect the friendly force. The answer to this dilemma lies in the ability of counterinsurgency forces to apply their combat power precisely against enemy targets. In an insurgency environment, friendly combat power must be guided by exact, detailed tactical intelligence whenever possible.

Therefore, the differences between counterinsurgency and conventional warfare alter the focus of the intelligence system. On the conventional battlefield, operational intelligence is preeminent. Its focus is on large units (i.e. divisions, armies, fronts), their capabilities, current operations and future intentions. In contrast, the focus of intelligence in a counterinsurgency environment is at the small unit, tactical level. Tactical intelligence is vital for success in the counterinsurgency environment. FM 90-8, Counterquerrilla Operation, summarizes this as follows:

"Tactical intelligence is the key to defeating the guerrilla. It provides the commander with information about guerrilla locations, activities, strengths, weaknesses, and plans which enable the commander to seize the initiative. Without intelligence sources, the chances of success (particularly in offensive operations) are limited and the commander must react to guerrilla initiatives rather than controlling the situation in the area of operations."¹³

The preeminence of tactical intelligence requires the intelligence system to place greater emphasis on collection methods other than those normally relied upon during conventional operations. The relative importance of the means of collecting intelligence shifts away from electronic collection means towards human intelligence (HUMINT) sources with particular emphasis on tactical reconnaissance capabilities. Colonel John F. Stewart, Director of Intelligence-J2, U.S. Southern Command noted this in saying:

"In low intensity conflict...there is a shift from technology derived intelligence (Radios, radars, photographs) to HUMINT, document exploitation, and materiel exploitation."¹⁴

While acknowledging the importance of technological means of intelligence collection, COL Stewart places special emphasis on the role of HUMINT in low-intensity conflict. In his article Military Intelligence Operations in Low Intensity Conflict: An Organizational Model, COL Stewart points out the critical importance of HUMINT in saying:

"By the very nature of low intensity conflict, where the struggle is between the government and the guerrilla for the loyalty of the people, HUMINT, particularly low-level tactical HUMINT, is potentially, the most important military intelligence weapon in our arsenal. Interrogation and troop reports...provide the parts of a clear tactical intelligence picture... HUMINT does hold the

potential to provide the crucial warning on an enemy that operates in small numbers, normally avoids direct confrontation, and selects targets based on careful understanding of vulnerabilities. In effect,... a major focus of collection by friendly military should be on tactical HUMINT operations."¹⁵

The value of technical intelligence information declines quickly in the rapidly changing environment of a counterinsurgency. Therefore, tactical reconnaissance, as part of a HUMINT collection program, is of significantly greater value than in conventional warfare. Tactical reconnaissance tends to provide combat information rather than combat intelligence. Combat information is raw data that can be passed directly to combat and combat support units to be used for fire and maneuver without interpretation, analysis, or integration with other data. Intelligence is data that requires some form of validation, integration, analysis, or comparison with some other data before it can be used or fully exploited.¹⁶ Time taken to process information may result in a lost opportunity to strike an elusive enemy. Tactical reconnaissance, therefore, provides the tactical commander with the "eyes" necessary to employ his assets in a timely, precise and efficient manner.

In summary, real-time, tactical intelligence is critical to conducting counterinsurgency warfare successfully. The specific types of intelligence required to support tactical operations in a counterinsurgency environment are not significantly different from those required to support operations in a conventional theater. The nature of the counterinsurgency battlefield, however, acts to reduce the effectiveness of most high technology systems in meeting the needs of the tactical commander. The need for precise, detailed, and timely combat information demands that tactical reconnaissance assume a much larger role in the intelligence gathering scheme. In the mid- to high-intensity conflict arena, technology based intelligence collection means are dominant. In counterinsurgency warfare, HUMINT, especially tactical reconnaissance, becomes the major source of intelligence necessary to support tactical operations.

III. THE RECONNAISSANCE CAPABILITY OF THE LID

The light infantry division is organized and equipped to maximize its strategic deployability (Figure 1).

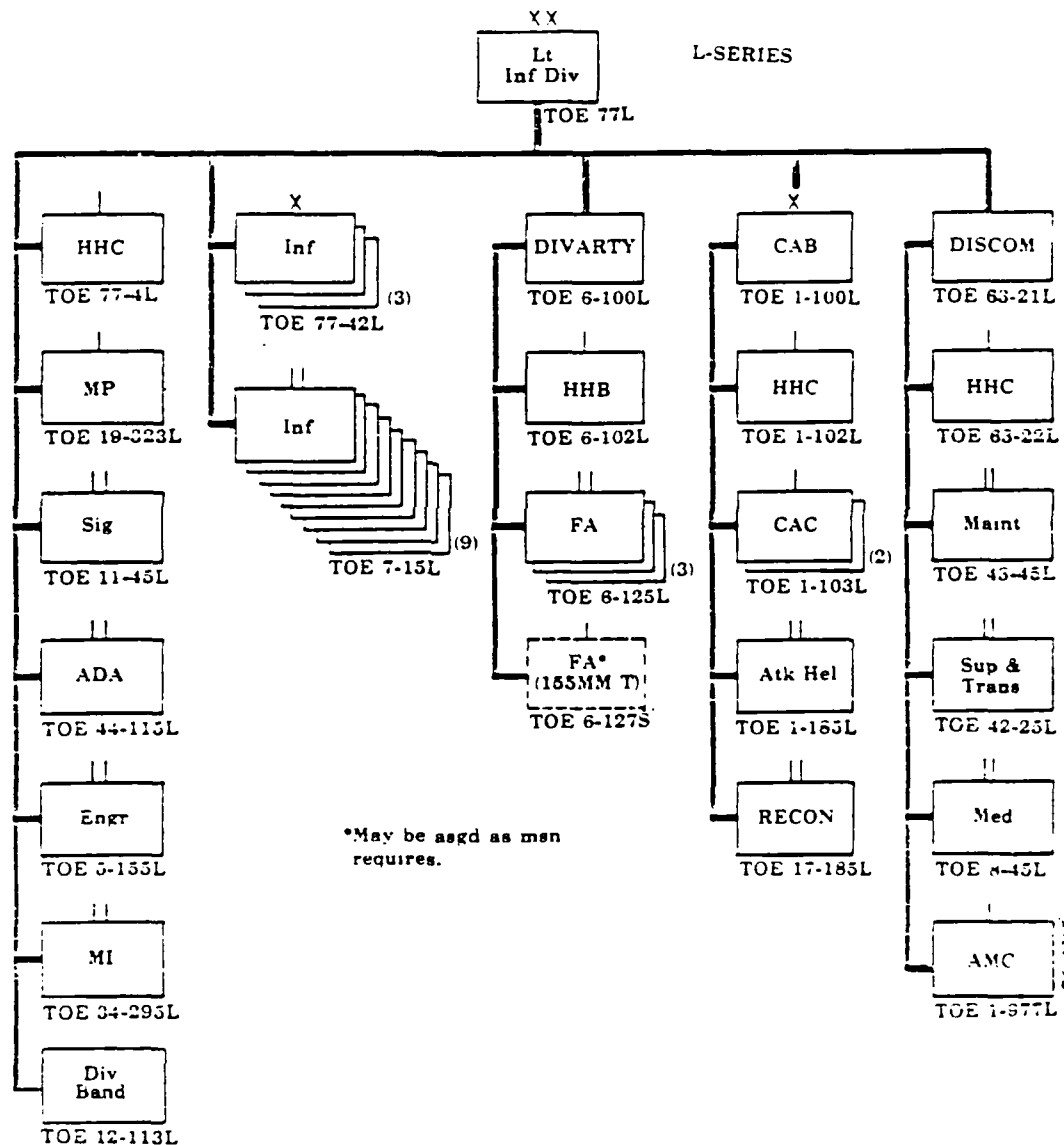


Figure 1

The division's organization includes division troops, nine infantry battalions organized into three brigades, division artillery

equipped with 105mm towed howitzers, an aviation brigade, and a division support command. For the most part, the division is foot mobile. The limited number of heavy weapons, principally mortars, TOW ATGMs, and 105mm howitzers are transported or towed by 1 1/4 ton, wheeled prime movers. The combat support and combat service support force structure is austere with all non-essential elements having been removed from the division and placed at corps level. As such, the division is capable of operating for only 48 hours without outside support.¹⁷ The division's force structure provides only a small portion of the firepower available to a normal division. As a result, LID operations must substitute initiative, stealth, and surprise for brute force in order to achieve tactical success.¹⁸ The division's command and control structure is designed to quickly accept and employ the combat, combat support and combat service support augmenting forces necessary for the division to operate for extended periods of time or in a mid- to high-intensity conflict environment.¹⁹ In accordance with current counterinsurgency doctrine, the LID may be employed separately or under a corps headquarters as part of the Army component of a joint task force.

When conducting counterinsurgency warfare, the division will rarely conduct division size operations. The division will normally act as a command and control headquarters providing support to its maneuver brigades. The brigades will often conduct their tactical operations in widely separate areas of operations or AOs.²⁰ The specific size of any operation within a brigade AO will vary from platoon to multiple battalion size, consistent with the immediate threat and the objectives of the operation.

As with all other combat support functions, the intelligence and reconnaissance gathering force structure of the LID is austere. Dedicated reconnaissance capabilities are provided at division level by a small, light reconnaissance squadron and at battalion level by a dismounted scout platoon. In addition, the division has assigned a small Combat Electronic Warfare Intelligence (CEWI) battalion to collect, organize, and process intelligence. The operational concept for both the reconnaissance squadron and the CEWI battalion call for each to operate under the primary direction of the division G-2.²¹

The reconnaissance squadron (Figure 2) consists of a headquarters troop, a ground reconnaissance troop, two air reconnaissance troops, and a long range surveillance detachment (LRSD). Three EH-60 "Quick Fix" helicopters are assigned to the headquarters troop.

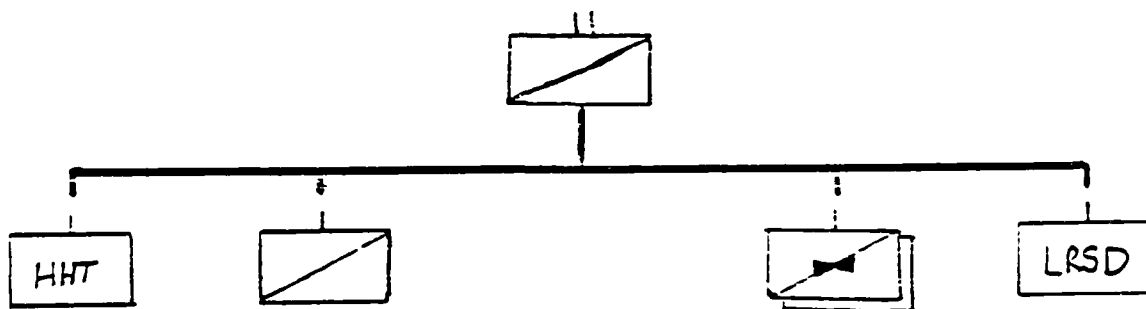


Figure 2

The single ground troop consists of two wheeled, scout platoons equipped with 12 High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWVs) mounting 25mm cannons. The scouts are supported by two anti-armor platoons equipped with 8 HMMWV mounted TOW missile systems. The 8 TOW systems represent nearly 1/5 of the division's ground mounted anti-armor capability. Cross attachment of the platoons provides the capability to form 4 reconnaissance teams. The troop has a limited dismounted reconnaissance capability and has no organic ground surveillance radar capability.

Each of the two air reconnaissance troops is organized into a troop headquarters, a scout platoon of 6 OH-58 observation helicopters and an attack helicopter platoon equipped with 4 AH-1S Cobra attack helicopters. When task organized, the air troops may form a maximum of 6 aerial reconnaissance teams. Neither air troop possesses an organic ground reconnaissance or "aerorifle" element which could be inserted into an area to conduct detailed ground reconnaissance or provide a continuous surveillance capability.

The long range surveillance detachment is small, consisting of four long range surveillance teams, two base stations and a signal squad. It has no internal logistics or transportation capability. All personnel within the detachment are highly trained and ranger qualified. The detachment is capable of providing HUMINT for extended periods of time in areas remote from the areas of operation of deployed combat forces.

The 295 man Combat Electronic Warfare Intelligence (CEWI) battalion provides combat intelligence, electronic warfare, ground-based communications intercept, tactical counterintelligence, interrogation of enemy prisoners of war, and ground surveillance radar support functions for the division. The ground surveillance radar platoon is equipped with 12 PPS-15 man portable radar sets capable of detecting personnel at ranges of up to 1500 meters. This gives the division the capability to form up to 6 radar teams.

A 19 man, foot-mobile scout platoon provides a dedicated reconnaissance capability for each infantry battalion. The conventional missions of the battalion scout platoon are to perform local reconnaissance, provide limited security, and assist in controlling movement of the battalion or its elements. To perform these missions, the platoon is equipped with short range, man-packed FM radios and is capable of task organizing into three patrols or OP elements.⁴ The platoon, however, is neither equipped nor trained to conduct long range surveillance missions similar to those conducted by the division's LRSD. The limited range of its radios forces the platoon to be employed very close to its parent battalion. Similarly, the size of the platoon and its limited number of radios make it impractical to form additional patrols or OPs. This constrains the platoon's ability to conduct effective saturation patrolling in search of a dispersed guerrilla force.

The limited number of assets available at the division level severely restricts its ability to meet the tactical reconnaissance requirements of counterinsurgency warfare. The division itself possesses only a minimum amount of HUMINT and aerial reconnaissance capability. Given the decentralization of operations typical of a counterinsurgency environment, the division will find it difficult

to provide sufficient assets to support the individual operations of its three brigades. Without significant corps augmentations, the division will be required to commit its support in favor of a designated brigade with a corresponding lack of support to others. The nine battalion scout platoons of the division possess significant HUMINT potential. As currently organized and equipped, however, these units are incapable of augmenting the division's long range surveillance capabilities and are restricted to operating in close proximity of their parent battalion.

Inherent in the force structure design of the LID is the requirement that it be augmented with Corps plugs when employed for more than 48 hours. Therefore, any evaluation of the intelligence and reconnaissance gathering capabilities of the LID must take into account the augmentation that the division could normally expect to receive when deployed for a counterinsurgency mission. That support may include elements of the corps' armored cavalry regiment, military intelligence brigade, long range reconnaissance company, or combat aviation brigade.

The division may have its ground reconnaissance capability augmented with some portion of the corps' armored cavalry regiment. The regiment's tanks, armored personnel carriers, attack helicopters and artillery would significantly increase the firepower of the division. Likewise, such systems would improve its ability to conduct security missions as well as area, zone and route reconnaissance missions in terrain conducive to track vehicle operations. Augmentation by one or more of the ACR's air cavalry troops would greatly increase the division's own aerial reconnaissance capability. Significantly, the ACR has no dismounted HUMINT assets with which to augment the division. Overall, the ACR's ground systems present too great a signature to conduct covert reconnaissance. With its formidable combat power, the ACR may be best suited for conducting reconnaissance in force and security operations in a counterinsurgency arena.

Augmentation of the LID's long range HUMINT capability may be provided in the form of additional teams from the corps' LRS company. These teams are organized and equipped in a similar fashion

as those found in the division. Significant augmentation by the corps LRS assets would greatly improve the division's HUMINT capability. It should be noted, however, that the corps' LRS assets are often used against operational or strategic targets and are, therefore, not normally available for day-to-day tactical reconnaissance missions.

Finally, the division's intelligence gathering and processing capability may be augmented by the corps' intelligence brigade. The LID is already highly dependent upon corps for IEW support. Tactical intelligence augmentation would come in two areas; expanded HUMINT in the form of additional interrogators and increased electronic signature collection capability. While each of these augmentations would significantly increase the intelligence gathering capability of the division, neither would improve its capability to conduct tactical reconnaissance.

In considering the degree of corps augmentation that might be available to support the LID when employed on a counterinsurgency mission, it should be noted that a number of factors may limit the degree of support available. The deployment of the division may not be conducted in a vacuum. The Army may be required to meet multiple contingencies simultaneously. Other contingencies of higher priority may draw the available intelligence assets. To assume that large scale reinforcement of the LID will always be available would be extremely dangerous. Likewise, the intelligence support requirements of the corps itself may severely limit the number of assets which could realistically be released to the division. Finally, corps assets are designed and manned to meet corps level intelligence requirements. As such, they are not optimized to meet the tactical, real time information needs of the brigades, battalions, and companies conducting low level, tactical operations. Overall, it may be unrealistic to expect significant augmentation of the division's tactical reconnaissance assets from corps..

Still another source of reconnaissance capability would be the employment of existing infantry units to augment or perform the tactical reconnaissance mission. As described by BG Henderson, commanders routinely employ their organic assets to perform

reconnaissance in accordance with their doctrinal responsibilities for local security and to develop the situation upon contact. It is, therefore, logical to look at tactical formations for manpower and equipment to expand the division's reconnaissance capabilities. Several factors, however, would seem to argue against such a position.

Historically, the Army evaluated and rejected such an idea during WWII as part of its evaluation of newly formed "light" infantry divisions. In 1943, the U.S. Army began an extensive evaluation of a 10,000 man, lightly armed division organized for strategic mobility. 3 such divisions were organized; the 10th, 71st, and the 89th divisions. Within the divisions, reconnaissance units were eliminated and line maneuver units were employed to perform required reconnaissance. After substantial testing and evaluation by various overseas commands, then engaged in combat operations, the light divisions were scrapped and converted into standard divisions. Among the major reasons identified in the evaluation report leading to the demise of these divisions was the lack of sufficient, dedicated reconnaissance units and its negative affect on the division's combat effectiveness.²²

Secondly, the diversion of manpower from the already austere force structure of the LID would significantly decrease the combat capabilities of assigned infantry battalions to conduct sustained combat operations. The light infantry division's infantry battalions are assigned only 559 personnel by TOE (as compared to 800 troops in a H-series infantry battalion). Given historical personnel losses to battle, disease, accidents, and administrative diversions, a battalion can expect to conduct daily operations at less than 80% strength.²³ The diversion of additional troops for any reason would significantly impair the combat capability of the unit.

In his study of the adequacy of the LID's Cavalry Squadron to conduct security operations in support of the standard missions identified in the division's operational concept (attack, defend, etc.), Major Nathen Noyes concluded that diversion of infantry battalion assets to perform security functions would seriously

degrade the LID's capability to carry out its assigned missions. Specifically he concluded that

*"With the exception of a deliberate attack, this division will only be able to employ 33 to 66 percent of its potential combat power for any given operation. The rest...will be needed to meet its security requirements."*²⁴

Obviously, the lack of redundancy built into the light division's force structure, in the name of strategic mobility, greatly restricts its ability to divert assets into any function other than that for which it was specifically designed.

A second group of factors which argue against the large scale diversion of infantry assets for the reconnaissance mission are the special skills, aptitudes, and equipment required for the job. The army has long recognized this as exemplified by the assignment of specially organized, trained, and equipped scout or reconnaissance elements within battalion, division, and corps structures. Several historical examples exist which highlight the Army's recognition that special attributes are required of reconnaissance personnel.

In the Burmese theater during world war II, LTG William Slim, commander of the 14th Army, employed a light infantry force of more than 20,000 men to conduct operations deep in the Japanese rear area. These forces included such well known units as the British Special Force or Chindits and the 5037th Composite Unit (provisional), more popularly known as Merrill's Marauders. These hand picked, highly trained units possessed a special appreciation of the critical importance of their reconnaissance elements. A study of these units by the Combat Studies Institute of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College reported the following:

"The reconnaissance platoons also received a great deal of emphasis. Both Galahad (5037th) and the Special Force used their best men in these units because of the critical functions they performed regarding intelligence, warning, and surprise. The reconnaissance "platoons" were the elites of the Chindits. They needed to be."²⁵

The requirement for superior reconnaissance personnel was also recognized by units operating in the European theater. One such unit was the 104th "Timberwolf" Infantry Division. Based on his extensive combat experiences as the commander of the 1st Infantry Division in North Africa and Sicily, the commander of the 104th, MG Terry Allen de la Mesa instituted an extremely rigorous training program for the division, emphasizing scouting and reconnaissance skills. After evaluating the performance of each soldier in such diverse areas as physical conditioning, map reading and land navigation, use of weapons, and the ability to swim, the toughest and best trained soldiers were selected to form the division's reconnaissance unit.²⁶

While the average soldier is perfectly capable of performing within his primary military specialty, historically, combat commanders have recognized a need for specially trained, equipped and motivated reconnaissance troops. Despite the high quality of soldier which makes up the LID, there is nothing that indicates that the historical requirement for specially trained, dedicated reconnaissance personnel has changed.

Overall, the tactical reconnaissance capability of the LID is austere to the point of ineffectiveness. In the requirement rich environment of counterinsurgency warfare, the division's organic capabilities would soon be overloaded. The division is capable of fully supporting the operations of only a single deployed brigade with organic reconnaissance units. The division appears to be seriously deficient with regards to the critical HUMINT assets suggested by COL Stewart to be the cornerstone of military intelligence collection efforts in a low-intensity environment. Even with a reasonable degree of augmentation from corps, the division does not appear to have the capability to perform the tactical

reconnaissance necessary without a substantial diversion of line maneuver battalion personnel, from their primary combat missions, to a reconnaissance role. This, in turn, would result in a corresponding decrease in the combat capability of the division's infantry battalions. Without significant augmentation, however, the division will be extremely dependent upon the host nation's intelligence gathering capability for much of the critical, detailed information necessary to conduct effective tactical operations.

IV. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES- U.S. COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATIONS IN VIETNAM, 1966

The most recent U.S. experience with light infantry forces employed to counter large guerrilla and regular light infantry formations conducting insurgent warfare was the Vietnamese conflict. In a conflict as long and diverse as the Vietnamese conflict, it is difficult to select any single operation as "typical" of light infantry actions. Nonetheless, in researching unit after-action reports, an operational employment pattern emerged. Armed with a general area of operations provided by the intelligence community, commanders would conduct wide-spread reconnaissance in force operations with units of sufficient size to insure their interim survival should they make contact with the enemy. Upon contact, units would assume a defensive posture and attempt to develop the situation by fire. If the enemy contact was substantial, higher commanders would reinforce the unit in contact, often using airmobility, to establish an unassailable base. From that base, massive amounts of artillery and air delivered fires would be directed against the enemy force in an attempt to destroy him. Such engagements were rarely decisive as the enemy tended to retain freedom of maneuver and could break contact when desired. There were exceptions to this pattern, however. Occasionally, U.S. forces, guided by solid tactical intelligence, were able to surprise the enemy with devastating effect. As such, operations involving the 2d Bn, 8th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division and the 2d Bn, 502d Infantry, 101st Airborne Division during the fall of 1966 were

selected to illustrate these two types of operations. In both cases, the enemy forces being sought were elements of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). A light infantry formation with few heavy weapons, the NVA was engaged in conducting company, battalion and regimental size maneuver operations typical of the war of movement phase of an insurgency. As previously stated, it is during this phase when U.S. combat formations would doctrinally be committed to combat. The enemy was, at that time, operating from remote jungle bases at the end of a tenuous and austere logistical support lifeline. Following the battle descriptions, an analysis of the effectiveness of reconnaissance/intelligence operations conducted throughout the period of the Vietnam conflict will be presented.

Operation Paul Revere IV-In the early morning hours of 28 October 1966, the soldiers of Company C, 2d Battalion, 8th U.S. Infantry, 4th (U.S.) Infantry Division, were searching for the enemy north and west of the Se San river in Kontum province as part of Operation Paul Revere IV. Intelligence information provided to the division indicated that there had been a significant build up of enemy forces in the province resulting from the infiltration of large numbers of NVA troops. The area had not been penetrated by U.S. forces in more than a year. Aerial reconnaissance of the area had been unable to pinpoint enemy activity due to the dense foliage. Company C, as part of a larger battalion effort, had been air assaulted into the area in an attempt to locate and destroy suspected enemy forces and had been operating in the area for a number of days prior to achieving significant contact.

On the 28th, the company moved slowly through the dense vegetation as each of the two forward platoons used machetes to clear routes through the jungle. Late in the morning, the company came upon a wide trail running north to south with numerous branch trails leading off to either side. Vine guidelines for night travel as well as animal traps were evident. The company also discovered a communication wire running along an adjacent ridge. A squad, sent ahead to reconnoiter, had moved about 200 meters up the trail when it heard voices and saw two NVA soldiers. The squad returned to the company and reported a possible enemy base camp ahead. The company

commander chose to use the ridge as an axis of approach towards the suspected enemy base camp. The ridge itself became wider near its top, levelling off at a hilltop and saddle complex.

As the company moved cautiously up the finger (Map 1), it came upon several huts. As the company halted to search the huts, a sniper opened fire. The company took cover and began to return fire. As the fire died away, the company resumed its movement and soon entered a small village. It was apparent that an enemy force had abandoned the village just a short time before the company's arrival. The sound of movement could be heard 300-400 meters away to the northwest. The village huts were fairly new. New and under-construction bunker and tunnel fortifications were also found along with assorted food stuffs, NVA uniforms, French and Cambodian monies, and a variety of small arms ammunition. After a short break, the company resumed movement north along the ridge. As the company passed through the saddle and began its descent down the ridge, it began to take fire from the west. As the fire grew heavier, the company commander decided to establish a perimeter defense of the hill occupied by his two lead platoons. By 1500 hours the company had established its defense and was in the process of preparing positions from which it could ward off an enemy attack. By 2000 hours the position was completed, artillery registered, claymore mines emplaced and a four-man listening post set up only 20 meters from the edge of the village.

At about 0250 hours the next morning, noise from the village alerted the company. Shortly thereafter, the perimeter began to receive automatic weapons fire. As the listening post attempted to withdraw to the perimeter, three of the four personnel were wounded. Moments later, the enemy attacked (Map 2). Heavy automatic weapons fire was concentrated on the company's machine guns as the NVA soldiers advanced. At this, the company commander ordered the claymore mines fired. This action, together with the heavy volume of fire from the perimeter, stopped the enemy advance. In the meantime, the artillery focussed their fires on the enemy's routes of movement, making it difficult for the NVA to maneuver. After 20 minutes of intense fighting, enemy fire began to diminish and by

0445 all contact with the enemy had been broken. At daylight, the company commander took stock of his situation. Two men had been killed. Another 10 had been wounded. A search of the surrounding area revealed six enemy bodies but no other signs of the enemy.²⁷

The 28-29 October engagement fought by C company was indecisive. At a cost of more than 10% of the company's present for duty strength, the unit had been unable to fix and decisively engage the enemy. After achieving initial surprise, the company lost the initiative and was quickly pinned down. The enemy was able to withdraw, return and attack, and disengage when it desired. Many of the causes for the ineffectiveness of this operation can be traced to the inadequacy of tactical reconnaissance. The heavy foliage precluded detection of the enemy base camp by any other means but ground reconnaissance. Despite this, no preliminary ground reconnaissance operations were conducted by the division prior to the commitment of forces into the area. In lieu of reconnaissance, the company, as part of its parent battalion, was committed to conduct search operations in the area. The company made no effort to conduct local patrolling with squad or platoon size elements in an effort to develop a knowledge of the local terrain and enemy situation. As a result, the company stumbled upon the enemy camp and found itself poorly positioned to decisively exploit the situation. Given his total lack of knowledge concerning the strength and intentions of the enemy force, the company commander made no attempt to maintain contact with the enemy once engaged. Instead, he chose to assume a defensive posture in lieu of further maneuver, thus surrendering all initiative to the enemy.

The Battle of Phong Cao. In contrast to the indecisive results achieved by C company, the battle of Phong Cao was a classic encirclement operation which resulted in the destruction of a NVA infantry battalion. The battle began 6 November 1966 when the 2d Bn, 502 Infantry, 101st Airborne Division air assaulted into four landing zones in the jungle fifteen miles northwest of Tuy Hoa. The strike force was stalking the 5th Bn, 95th NVA regiment which had been reported operating from a complex of base camps in a saddle formed by hills 450 in the north and 350 in the south. Interrogation

of enemy prisoners following the battle indicated that the battalion was refitting and under orders to withdraw, if necessary, to avoid decisive engagement.

The strike force had been directed into the area on the strength of a long range reconnaissance patrol report of an enemy base camp on hill 450. LTC Frank Dietrich, the strike force commander, suspected that NVA forces would avoid contact and leave the area if they realized that the battalion's objective was the hill. To conceal his intent, therefore, he selected a deception objective west of hill 450 and, upon landing, moved his companies away from the suspected enemy position. While doing so, he conducted extensive local patrolling. The battalion continued its deception operations on the 7th and 8th of November while encountering sporadic, light contact. Early on the afternoon of the 8th, LTC Dietrich turned the battalion towards hill 450. The strike force move was proceeded by movement of the battalion's recon platoon towards hill 450. The platoon screened the battalion's change of direction and, upon arriving in the vicinity of hill 450, confirmed its occupation by enemy forces. The battalion commander immediately put into effect his plan for surrounding the saddle (Map 3). The plan called for movement by forced marches of B and C companies into blocking positions west and south of the hill complex. Company A would be airlifted early on 9 November into blocking positions on the north and east of the hill complex. The recon platoon would complete the circle in the northwest and link A company with the rest of the battalion elements. Late on the morning of the 9th, as they moved into position, elements of the recon platoon and B company surprised an enemy platoon size element as it descended from the hill mass moving west. The enemy withdrew towards hill 350. Supported by an airstrike and fires from a battery of 155mm howitzers, company B assaulted hill 350 and secured the position. The air assault by company A was unopposed and, by night fall, the battalion had completed encirclement of the enemy position. Throughout the 10th, the battalion fought off probing actions by the NVA and slowly closed the ring around hill 450 until the entire force was deployed in a circle roughly 600 meters in diameter around the hill. A

captured prisoner confirmed that the enemy's 5th battalion was still on the hill. During the night, the enemy attempted and failed to break out of the trap five times. On the morning of the 11th, accompanied by psychological operations broadcasts to the trapped NVA, the strike force kept up the pressure. This effort culminated with an assault of hill 450 by B and C companies. Simultaneously, A company swept the northern slope of the position. After some initial resistance the position was secured. The battle was over. Seventy-five enemy soldiers were killed or captured during the final assault. Blood trails, parts of bodies, and prisoner reports indicated that many more had died. Fourteen crew served weapons as well as substantial amounts of individual weapons, equipment, ammunition, and other supplies were also captured. U.S. casualties during the operation were five killed and fifteen wounded.²⁸

The battle of Phong Cao dramatically highlights the impact of effective tactical reconnaissance on U.S. operations. In contrast to the blind searching of the previous example, the soldiers of the 101st were employed with efficiency and effectiveness as they almost surgically deceived, encircled and destroyed an enemy battalion. Rather than dissipating its strength while employed on search operations, the battalion was employed as a strike force targeted against a known enemy position. The battalion was able to employ tactics described by BG Willard Pearson, commander of the 1st Brigade, 101st Division as "semiguerrilla" based on their knowledge of the current enemy situation. These tactics emphasized stealth, deception, night operations, reduced helicopter traffic, and offensive action in an effort to maintain the initiative.²⁹ What gave the 2d Bn, 502d Infantry the ability to use these tactics was effective tactical recon. Commitment of the battalion for a strike mission was only possible after the enemy position had been identified and reconnoitered by a long range reconnaissance patrol. The battalion's effective use of deception was made possible by the LRRP's information and the aggressive patrolling activities of the battalion once on the ground. Likewise, the effective use of the battalion's reconnaissance platoon to provide both security and up-to-the-minute information about enemy dispositions on the hill 450

complex allowed LTC Dietrich to continue his deception operation as long as possible and to avoid tipping his hand by the use of aerial scouts. Likewise, he was able to adjust his plan for encircling the position as required. LTC Dietrich was able to decisively maneuver his forces, secure in the knowledge that he had the initiative based on superior tactical intelligence.

The 101st Airborne Division's success at Phong Cao was rarely duplicated. Unfortunately, the experiences of company C, 2d Bn, 8th Infantry were far more the norm. During the period of 1965-1971, a large, well-equipped U.S. field army, with total freedom of movement, overwhelming fire superiority, and backed by a modern and technologically advanced intelligence apparatus was unable to bring enemy forces into decisive combat. During the same period, U.S. forces sustained hundreds of thousands of casualties within their combat units. Significant among the reasons for the lack of effectiveness of U.S. ground forces was the ineffectiveness of tactical reconnaissance operations conducted in their support. In analyzing U.S. reconnaissance operations in light of the counterinsurgency requirements identified in section II, a number of factors emerge as contributing to the ineffectiveness of the recon effort. The intelligence gathering system was oriented at providing intelligence support for operational planning and was ill-suited for supporting the tactical level of operations which dominated the war. The tactical reconnaissance assets organic to each echelon of the force were ill-equipped to conduct effective reconnaissance, given the terrain and enemy tactics. In addition, the predominant tactical employment techniques used by U.S. forces tended to minimize requirements for tactical intelligence and, thus, failed to provide an impetus for improving tactical reconnaissance capabilities.

A major contributing factor to the lack of tactical maneuver success was the failure of the intelligence system to address tactical information requirements. Vietnam presented the Army's intelligence system with a set of battlefield conditions and requirements for which, in part, it was ill-prepared. The intelligence apparatus that deployed into Southeast Asia reflected 20 years of organizational and doctrinal preparation oriented

towards fighting a conventional war in Europe. As a result, the intelligence system was prepared to provide the types of information required to conduct large unit operations but was not organized to support the small unit actions which characterized operations in Vietnam. A study of tactical intelligence in Vietnam was conducted by the General Research Company for an agency of the Department of Defense. The study found primary intelligence requirements of small unit tactical commanders included the location, composition and strength of enemy units and base camps, the tactical behavior of those forces, and their offensive and defensive capabilities. The study further concluded that in operations against main force units, the tactical commanders interviewed indicated that the intelligence system failed to meet their critical needs.³⁰ U.S. units moving into battle seldom had accurate advanced knowledge of the location, size, function, and prepared defenses of enemy units, base camps, supply points and support facilities. Operation Paul Revere IV serves as evidence of this fact.

The intelligence community's failure to provide timely, tactical intelligence support stemmed from a variety of reasons. The basic intelligence structure and its mode of operations grew out of requirements to support the situation existing in early 1965. The introduction of North Vietnamese army regular units coupled with the widespread Viet Cong infrastructure began to overwhelm the intelligence system with data.³¹ The enemy appeared to have been everywhere. In this target rich environment, the intelligence community was tasked to determine what areas of operations offered the greatest immediate pay-off for the employment of the relatively few U.S. ground forces. The equally limited intelligence assets were centralized and assigned the mission of supplying operational intelligence to support campaign planning. The capability to concurrently meet tactical and operational level requirements did not exist. Coupled with their prewar orientation towards operational intelligence, the intelligence community readily fell into a pattern of support that lasted well beyond the changes from an operational to a largely tactical battlefield and the great expansion of intelligence assets available in country. The potential for a

similar set of circumstances exist today with the limited amount of intelligence and reconnaissance assets available to the current light division. Once again, senior commanders may be faced with the dilemma of choosing between centralizing their intelligence assets in an effort to meet their own intelligence requirements or decentralize those assets in support of subordinate unit operations.

Secondly, the intelligence community placed great reliance on high technology devices as a means of gathering intelligence. Examples of this technology included satellite photography, unattended seismic ground sensors, infrared heat sensors, "people sniffers", signal intercept equipment, and high performance aircraft reconnaissance flights.³² While careful analysis of the data provided by these sources could point field force (corps) and division commanders towards areas which held the greatest promise of contact with major enemy elements, they suffered from a number of deficiencies which reduced their effectiveness in supporting tactical operations. As a rule, information produced by these sources was communicated directly to higher command levels, bypassing the tactical level completely. As a result, the intelligence produced tended to be "old" and of limited utility on the tactical battlefield when finally received by maneuver units. For example, it required 4-7 days for air photography requests to be processed.³³ The effectiveness of most high technology sources was also dependent upon local weather, topographic, and foliage conditions. Low clouds, mountainous terrain or dense jungle reduced their usefulness substantially. In addition, the large amount of data produced by these sources required detailed analysis to be converted into useful intelligence. This provided additional impetus towards drawing available intelligence personnel away from tactical headquarters into higher levels of command. By 1967, for example, over 3100 personnel under the control of the Military Assistance Command J2 alone, were employed for this function.³⁴ High technology sources were highly successful in providing intelligence useful in directing the war effort. They, however, tended to have only a marginal effect on execution of the tactical operations necessary to conduct the war. Obviously, the U.S. Army still places

great reliance on technology to meet its intelligence gathering needs. The success of technological intelligence sources in Vietnam confirms that they will play an important role on the counterinsurgency battlefield. Yet, as pointed out by COL Stewart in his analysis of intelligence gathering systems and confirmed in Vietnam, technology cannot be used as a substitute for HUMINT.

The HUMINT potential of ground recon assets, primarily Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols (LRRPs), was never fully exploited by the intelligence system. Early in the conflict, ground recon was recognized by the intelligence community as the only means of providing "timely, accurate information on all aspects of the enemy and the area of operations."³⁵ While LRRPs were commonly employed by all higher echelons, their operational procedures and missions negated much of their tactical reconnaissance value. MG McChristian, J-2, U.S. Army Vietnam, summarized their operational shortcomings in saying:

*"Most U.S. ground recon was conducted to locate and conduct air or artillery strikes on enemy targets. Adequate emphasis was not given to avoiding detection, maintaining contact, and keeping the commander informed."*³⁶

A review of unit SOPs for LRRP employment confirms MG McChristian's view.³⁷

The failure of the U.S. intelligence community to use LRRPs and other ground recon assets to fill gaps in their intelligence collection capability and to exploit the real-time intelligence they produced to support tactical operations can not be easily explained. It can be noted, however, that LRRP missions tended to be employed against operational targets in support of theater interdiction missions and were not always, readily available. In addition, the employment of LRRPs was considered a high cost operation in terms of its requirements for helicopters and highly trained manpower.³⁸ For these reasons, one can surmise that LRRP missions, in support of tactical operations, were viewed by the intelligence community as a

diversion of an effective but limited asset away from its primary role.

On occasion, LRRPs were effectively employed to augment tactical reconnaissance capability. The 101st Airborne's success in trapping an enemy battalion at Phong Cao was directly tied to the success of a LRRP team in finding the enemy's precise location before the strike force was deployed into the area. This allowed the strike force to be used with maximum efficiency and effectiveness. The tactical intelligence potential of LRRPs when employed in this way was summed up by MG William R. Peers, when he commanded the 4th Infantry Division:

*"In 1967, before we had any form of surveillance unit such as people sniffers and the air cavalry with the scout unit, every major battle that the 4th Infantry Division got itself into was initiated by the actions of a Long Range Patrol; every single one of them. That included the battle of Dak To for the long range patrols completely uncovered the enemy movements. We knew exactly where he was coming from through our long range patrol actions."*³⁹

Compounding the failure of the intelligence system to provide detailed, tactical intelligence was the inability of the recon elements organic to maneuver units to perform that mission. The doctrinal requirement for unit level tactical reconnaissance capability was provided in the form of reconnaissance platoons at the battalion level, cavalry squadrons at division level, and an armored cavalry regiment within the Corps structure. These units were small, in comparison to the supported unit, vehicular mounted, and often possessed significant antiarmor and ground surveillance radar capability. As such, they were ill-equipped to perform the tactical recon mission in Vietnam. For example, in 1965, a typical infantry battalion recon platoon consisted of a jeep mounted platoon headquarters, two jeep mounted scout squads, and a jeep mounted ground surveillance radar section totalling 21 men.⁴⁰ Designed to perform tactical reconnaissance against a mechanized, conventional threat operating along high speed avenues of approach in the European

theater, this organization was out of place on a battlefield where the operating area was huge and non-linear, roads were few, lines of sight often limited to a few feet, and maneuver by the enemy was by small, dismounted elements moving along unmarked trails or cross country. In the airmobile environment of Vietnam, the vehicles of the platoon acted as a further detriment to their ability to support the battalion. Paradoxically, the recon platoon, designed to be highly mobile, was significantly less mobile than the airmobile forces they supported. Likewise, the vehicle mounted platoons possessed neither the stealth nor the flexibility to find an elusive enemy. Similar inadequacies were evident in all of the organic recon organizations. As a result, reconnaissance units had less pure reconnaissance capability than the organizations they supported. By 1967, most commanders had reorganized their recon assets and were employing them as maneuver elements:

"The reconnaissance platoon was designated the 1st rifle platoon, Company D... Correctly calling the recon platoon a rifle platoon since this is its normal function. Foot recon is a combat operation integral to all rifle platoons." - After action report, 196th Infantry Bde, 30 April 1967.

This provided two immediate benefits to offset the loss of a dedicated reconnaissance capability. First, it provided an immediate increase in foxhole strength; a chronic problem for all commanders throughout the war. Secondly, it allowed commanders to overcome the weakness of the triangular battalion force structure. Early in the war, battalion commanders were quick to note that the mission requirements of the battalion quickly overwhelmed the capabilities of the three assigned maneuver companies. By combining the elements of the recon platoon with other battalion headquarters assets, a fourth maneuver company could be created. This greatly improved the battalion's ability to conduct sustained operations. LTG Julian Ewell, commander, 9th ID, explained it this way.

"The triangular organization, while effective in Europe... was very awkward in Vietnam. It is a miserable organization for semi-guerrilla operations. Battalions equipped with three companies reduced their ability to control large areas and their staying power. The desirability to "square" the battalion has long been recognized."⁴¹

When measured against the ineffective support provided by the reconnaissance assets in their primary role, the conversion of recon units to maneuver forces was an easy trade-off to make.

The conversion of ground reconnaissance assets into maneuver units was readily given the availability of heliborne scouts. It is safe to say that tactical reconnaissance in Vietnam was almost the exclusive domain of the air cavalry. Indicative of the universal ascendancy of the helicopter as the vehicle for tactical recon was a statement made by MG George Patton, then commander of the 11th ACR, nominally the reconnaissance unit for 2nd Field Force.

"Operations of the 11th Cavalry... depended on the eyes of those 9 warrant officers riding as scouts in the regiment's air cavalry troop."⁴²

A review of after-action reports of almost any U.S. unit operating in Vietnam will find similar sentiments expressed. The scout helicopter provided the commander the ability to overcome many of the inherent weaknesses of the ground scout. Air cavalry could be used to quickly scout large areas. They could be rapidly shifted into new operating areas to concentrate reconnaissance capabilities ahead of deploying forces. Heliborne scouts provided real-time intelligence which could be used to target enemy contacts for U.S. firepower or the immediate employment of ground forces. Certainly, the employment of helicopters in the reconnaissance mode was in keeping with the American technological approach to war and off-set, in part, the need for tedious, dangerous, and asset consuming ground recon operations.

The scout helicopter, however, was not capable of completely replacing ground reconnaissance. The scout helicopter suffered from many of the same weaknesses of other, high technology intelligence sources. First, there were simply not enough of them. The scout platoon of an air cavalry troop, airmobile division, in 1965, had a TOE strength of only 10 aircraft.⁴³ Given combat losses and normal maintenance requirements, the available aircraft might be reduced to six or fewer airframes in support of a maneuver brigade's area of operations. Secondly, the effectiveness of airborne reconnaissance is directly tied to the flying conditions. Meteorological, topographic, or battle conditions which reduced the helicopter's freedom of flight dramatically reduced its recon capability. The helicopter is not suited for covert operations. While contact could be made with enemy elements, the noise and visual signature of the bird was just as likely to alert enemy forces and allow them to take the necessary actions consistent with their intent. When used in support of ground force deployments, this often resulted in the dry holes or prepared enemy that characterized the Vietnam ground war.

The single greatest weakness of the helicopter scout concept, however, was its inability to meet the critical intelligence requirements of ground, tactical commanders outlined earlier. While wide ranging helicopters could often discover small enemy elements or fortifications, they had no way to develop more detailed information as to enemy strength, composition, orientation or intent. Helicopter generated intelligence could provide ground commanders a start point from which to initiate action. It could not tell them what to expect, how to best orient their axis of attack, or how much combat power was required. As a result, commanders were unable to employ their units as a strike force oriented at the destruction of the enemy. Instead, units were habitually forced to conduct a reconnaissance in force designed to find and localize the enemy as a necessary prelude to his destruction. As a result, fighting was usually conducted on the enemy's terms and with significantly more casualties than when making a rapid, unexpected, direct assault on his main force.⁴⁴

No one can deny the important role played by scout helicopters in Vietnam. They consistently served as the best source of timely tactical intelligence. When coupled with attack aircraft or artillery assets, air cavalry was extremely effective in harassing the enemy. However, the air scout did not have the capability to provide all the tactical reconnaissance necessary to allow ground forces to maneuver effectively to destroy the enemy. One senses that the almost universal praise given the scout helicopter stemmed not from its capability to meet the requirements, but from the fact that it was the only system performing tactical reconnaissance at all. GEN Don Starry, commander of the 11th ACR during 1970 summarized the need for integration of ground and air assets in performing tactical recon in his review of mounted combat in Vietnam in saying:

"The scout mission--reconnaissance--is still critical. Air cavalry adds a new dimension to reconnaissance; one complimentary to the reconnaissance of ground scouts."

On the whole, the helicopter alone could not adequately meet the tactical reconnaissance requirements of ground force commanders in Vietnam.

A third major contributing factor to the lack of tactical reconnaissance performed was the adoption, by U.S. forces, of battlefield employment techniques which, on the surface, seemed to relieve the commander of the requirement to conduct detailed tactical reconnaissance. Principal among these was the universally accepted use of airmobility as the primary means to move infantry forces to battle and the use of firepower as the primary means of destroying the enemy.

After the success of the 1st Cavalry Division in 1965-66 using airmobile tactics, the helicopter was universally embraced as the tool necessary to overcome both the terrain and avoidance tactics of the enemy. With the ability to quickly concentrate forces offered by airmobility, the detailed reconnaissance prescribed in doctrine to efficiently maneuver combat forces for decisive effect seemed no longer necessary. Fighting an enemy that had no fixed battle lines

nor support infrastructure (or perhaps none that could be gotten at), the enemy force itself became the center of attention. The only required intelligence was evidence of the presence of the enemy. The commander could then initiate the concentration of forces necessary to destroy him. Such operations required little preliminary reconnaissance since the specific battleground or enemy force to be engaged could not be predicted. While many such operations were classified as successful, given the casualties suffered by the enemy, the fact that, overwhelmingly, such engagements were indecisive and fought at the discretion of the enemy commander appears to be lost. Airmobility, in effect, relieved the commander of the requirement to husband his forces and, through detailed planning based on tactical reconnaissance, decisively employ them as a strike force against known enemy weakness. Rather, it allowed U.S. commanders the luxury of being like the biblical farmer who, by sowing many seeds, could not help but reap an occasional return.

A second battlefield employment technique which tended to minimize the importance of tactical reconnaissance was the general employment of "maneuver and fire" tactics by U.S. forces.⁴⁵ Although Army doctrine called for the employment of fires to pin an enemy force and the use of maneuver to destroy him, commanders in the field found it expedient to invert the relationship between the two elements of combat power. It allowed them to take full advantage of their greatly superior fire power while minimizing both casualties and the enemy's superior knowledge of the local terrain. Consistent with the techniques of airmobility, this employment technique eliminated the requirement for infantry forces to perform their doctrinal mission of closing with to destroy the enemy. U.S. forces in Vietnam simply did not maneuver in the face of the enemy. Once in contact, U.S. forces went to ground and applied available firepower, principally air and artillery, to destroy the enemy.⁴⁶ By eliminating maneuver, commanders minimized their requirements for conducting reconnaissance. In the absence of that requirement, the need to resolve the existing deficiencies with organic reconnaissance assets faded from view.

The LID will certainly make use of airmobility if employed in a counterinsurgency role. Airmobility is critical in offsetting many of the advantages of the insurgent. But as demonstrated in Vietnam, the ability to move forces rapidly by air is of little consequence if the mobility advantage it provides can't be used decisively. Similarly, the LID does not have the fire power or logistical support to employ the maneuver and fire tactics used by U.S. forces in Vietnam. By and large, the tactical employment patterns used by U.S. forces in Vietnam are inappropriate for the light infantry division. Therefore, the tactics used by the LID on any future counterinsurgency battlefield will require detailed, tactical reconnaissance to be effective.

During the period 1965-1971, the U.S. Army exhausted itself conducting a long series of indecisive ground operations within South Vietnam. In general, the lack of timely, tactical reconnaissance precluded ground forces from being employed in accordance with the imperatives outlined in FM 100-5 Operations. Without the detailed knowledge of the enemy or of the terrain, U.S. forces were unable to direct friendly strength against enemy weakness or to use the terrain to maximum advantage. As was the case with Company C, 2d Battalion, 8th U.S. Infantry, the enemy was able to set the conditions for engagement more often than not. As evidenced by the success of the 101st Airborne division at Phong Cao, this was not always the case. By effectively using the tactical reconnaissance capabilities of both the battalion and the division's LRRPs to augment other intelligence indicators, the division was able to focus its combat power and destroy an NVA battalion. Unfortunately, that action stands as an exception rather than a common occurrence during the conflict.

V. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study has been to assess the impact of the light infantry division's tactical reconnaissance capabilities on its ability to conduct counterinsurgency combat operations. The study began by examining the intelligence support requirements of a

low-intensity, counterinsurgency environment in an effort to assess the relative importance of tactical reconnaissance. From this examination, some important findings emerged. The differences between conventional and counterinsurgency warfare tends to shift the focus of intelligence gathering away from large unit activities and broad operational patterns to more detailed, tactical information. In the mid- to high-intensity arena, technical intelligence gathering means become predominant. In counterinsurgency warfare, HUMINT becomes the major source of intelligence necessary to support tactical operations. More specifically, the need for precise, timely, and detailed combat information demands that tactical reconnaissance receive much greater emphasis.

In comparing the requirement identified in Section II for a substantial tactical reconnaissance capability with the recon capabilities of the LID, a number of significant shortfalls were revealed. In general, the LID is extremely dependent upon corps augmentation to support all facets of its IEW effort. The light infantry division possesses only limited amount of tactical reconnaissance capability. The division appears to be seriously deficient with regard to critical long-range HUMINT assets necessary to locate dispersed guerrilla forces. The corps' intelligence and reconnaissance force structure is also limited with regard to tactical reconnaissance assets and cannot be expected to provide the specific types of augmentation assets, in the quantities necessary, to completely alleviate the shortages within the LID. Although the detailed planning and execution of tactical counterinsurgency combat operations is most often performed at brigade level, the brigade has neither an expanded intelligence analysis element nor dedicated reconnaissance capability. As such, the brigade must rely on division for intelligence and reconnaissance support of its operations. The division is capable of fully supporting the operations of only a single, deployed brigade with its organic reconnaissance units. In providing support to its deployed brigades, the division must sacrifice a portion or all of the intelligence gathering

capability needed to support its own long range planning. The division's primary reconnaissance organization, the reconnaissance squadron, lacks sufficient assets to perform sustained operations. The squadron is specifically short of dismounted ground reconnaissance assets and scout helicopters. While the scout platoons of the division's infantry battalions provide a potentially significant HUMINT capability, their equipment and training tends to restrict them to local operations in support of their parent battalions. Overall, even with a reasonable amount of augmentation from corps intelligence assets, the division does not appear to have the capability to perform the amount of tactical reconnaissance necessary without a substantial diversion of infantry battalion personnel to that mission.

U.S. counterinsurgency operations in Vietnam confirmed the importance of tactical reconnaissance in conducting counterinsurgency warfare. Where tactical reconnaissance was properly performed and integrated with maneuver planning, U.S. forces could be employed with efficiency, thereby preserving the force while achieving decisive results. Unfortunately, tactical reconnaissance was not emphasized during the majority of operations in Vietnam. As a result, most missions were conducted as search operations with U.S. units moving aimlessly about the battlefield in hopes that enemy forces encountered would stand, fight, and be destroyed by friendly firepower. Such operations were generally indecisive and costly to the units involved.

In light of this, the deficiencies noted in the LID's tactical reconnaissance capability have serious implications. The lack of tactical reconnaissance assets brings into question the ability of the light division to effectively perform the counterinsurgency combat mission. The lack of redundancy in the division's force structure demands that it be used efficiently to be effective. The preferred offensive techniques outlined in FC 71-101 for employment of light forces emphasizes deception, stealth, surprise, and the use of terrain to establish the conditions necessary for a sudden, violent and decisive attack,

usually directed against an enemy weakness. Such tactics demand the type of timely and continuous combat information best generated by tactical reconnaissance. As demonstrated by the 101st Airborne Division at Phong Cao, such tactics can be extremely effective when supported by effective reconnaissance. Unfortunately, the austerity of tactical recon assets within the division may preclude its ability to employ its combat forces in accordance with these principles and, therefore, deny the division the ability to be effective in a counterinsurgency role.

Likewise, the degree of reconnaissance augmentation necessary to allow the division to conduct effective operations in a low-intensity, counterinsurgency environment raises doubts as to its ultimate utility. At issue is whether the light division is truly optimized for low intensity warfare. As identified by COL Stewart in his paper on intelligence support of low-intensity operations, the fundamental relationship between maneuver and intelligence support may be changed in a low-intensity operation. Whereas in conventional, mid- to high-intensity operations, maneuver requirements drive the intelligence search; in low-intensity operations, maneuver normally must go where intelligence points. Intelligence, or, more specifically, HUMINT in the form of tactical reconnaissance, is the cornerstone of low-intensity, combat operations. The relative lack of these assets within the LID raises grave issues with regard to the division's low-intensity capabilities. While the LID is certainly too lightly armed and equipped to perform as regular infantry within a mid- to high-intensity conflict, the elimination of heavy equipment does not optimize it for low-intensity operations.

The purpose of this paper was not to prove that the LID is incapable of conducting counterinsurgency operations. Certainly, its ultimate success depends on a combination of many factors ranging from the capability of the the enemy force, political restrictions, the political commitment of the native population, the capability of the host nation's intelligence sources, and climatic conditions, to the nature of the terrain itself. Clearly implied by these findings, however, is that the lack of long-

range, tactical reconnaissance assets in the force structure of the light infantry division will severely hinder its ability to conduct operations efficiently and, therefore, effectively.

A number of potential remedies are available to help reduce the reconnaissance shortfall. They include:

a. Reconstitution of the aerorifle platoons in the division's air reconnaissance troops. This would provide the air cavalry the ability to perform detailed ground reconnaissance and to develop the intelligence contacts of the heliborne scouts. Much of the success enjoyed by the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) in Vietnam can be traced to their effective use of the aerorifle or "blues" platoons of the division's air cavalry troops.

b. Reinforcement of the air recon capability of the reconnaissance squadron. A third air reconnaissance troop should be added to the squadron. This would increase the unit's ability to perform sustained operations in light of maintenance and combat loss realities. In addition, this would provide the division the ability to support multiple brigade operations.

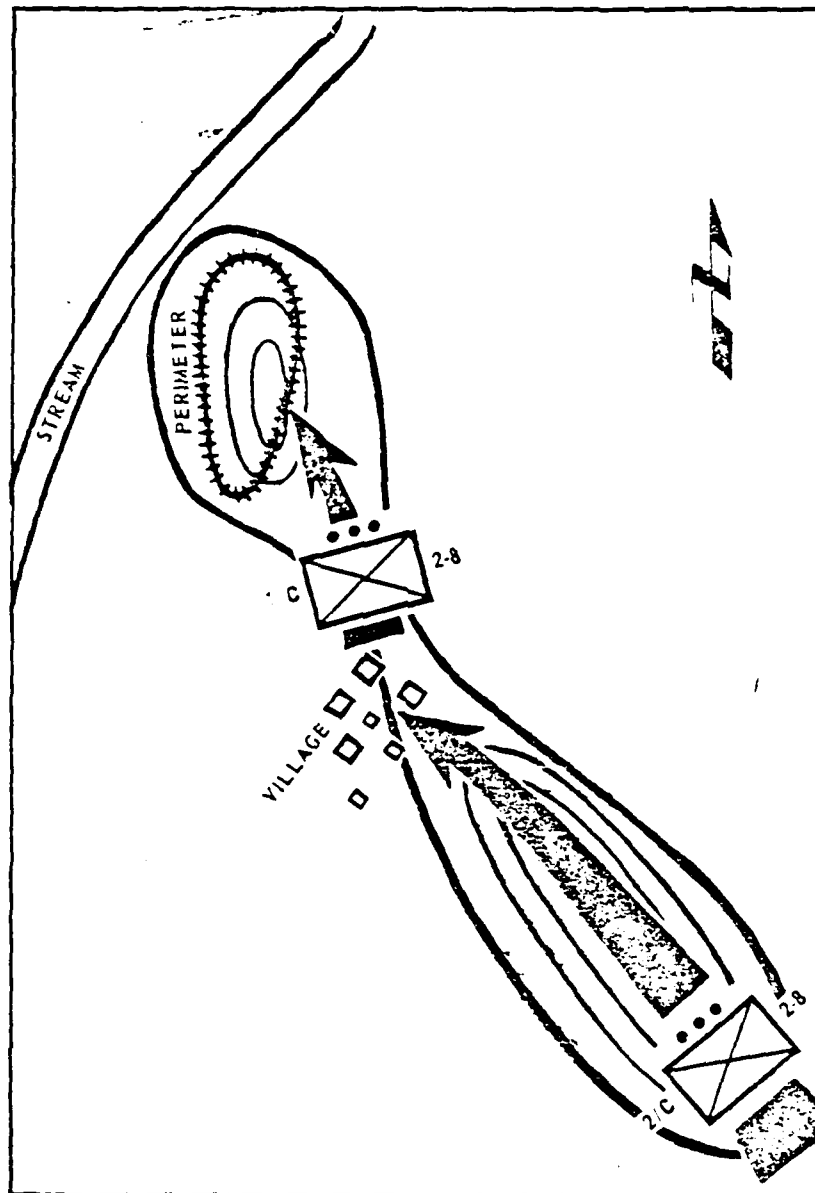
c. Expansion of the long range reconnaissance unit of the division from a detachment to a full company. The expanded capability would allow the use of these highly trained, reconnaissance personnel in support of both division and brigade tactical recon requirements. Likewise, while these expanded assets would be retained at division level to maximize flexibility and team training, teams should habitually be attached to specific brigades to conduct missions.

d. Expansion of battalion scout platoons for long range patrolling. As an alternative to expanding the division's LRS unit, the scout platoons of the infantry battalions could be tasked to assume an expanded role in both the division's and the brigade's intelligence collection efforts. By increasing the strength of the platoons slightly, providing them additional long range communications capability, and providing them additional training in long range patrolling skills, the battalion scout platoons could be employed in areas remote from their parent

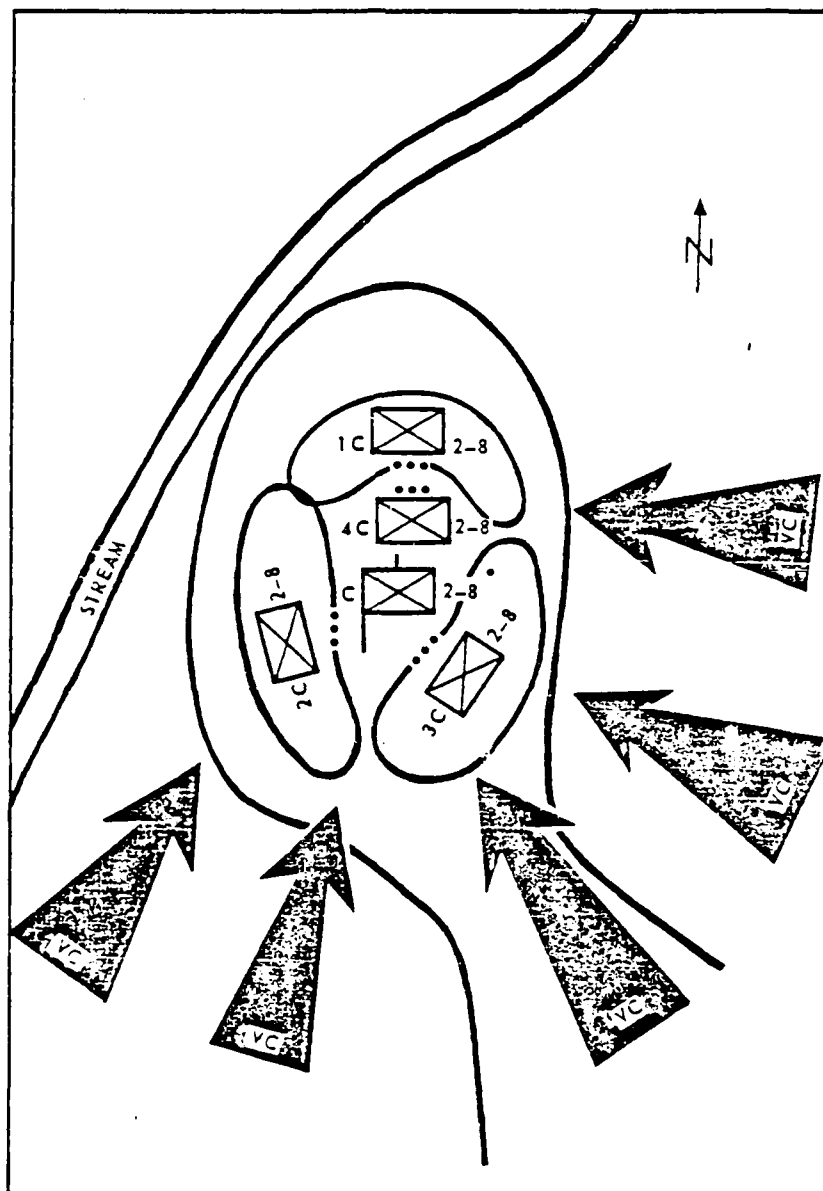
battalions. The cost of utilizing the battalion scout platoons in this fashion, however, would be the loss to the infantry battalion commander of his dedicated reconnaissance capability. This in turn, would require him to use already short infantry assets to perform the local reconnaissance, security, and command and control missions currently performed by the scout platoons.

e. Expansion of the intelligence analysis and processing assets at the brigade level. As the primary tactical command and control headquarters conducting counterinsurgency operations, it's logical to provide the brigade with the organic capability to analyze and interpret available intelligence in support of its maneuver scheme. Specifically, this would include expansion of the interrogation and materiel exploitation assets available to the brigade to allow it to more quickly take advantage of locally generated intelligence.

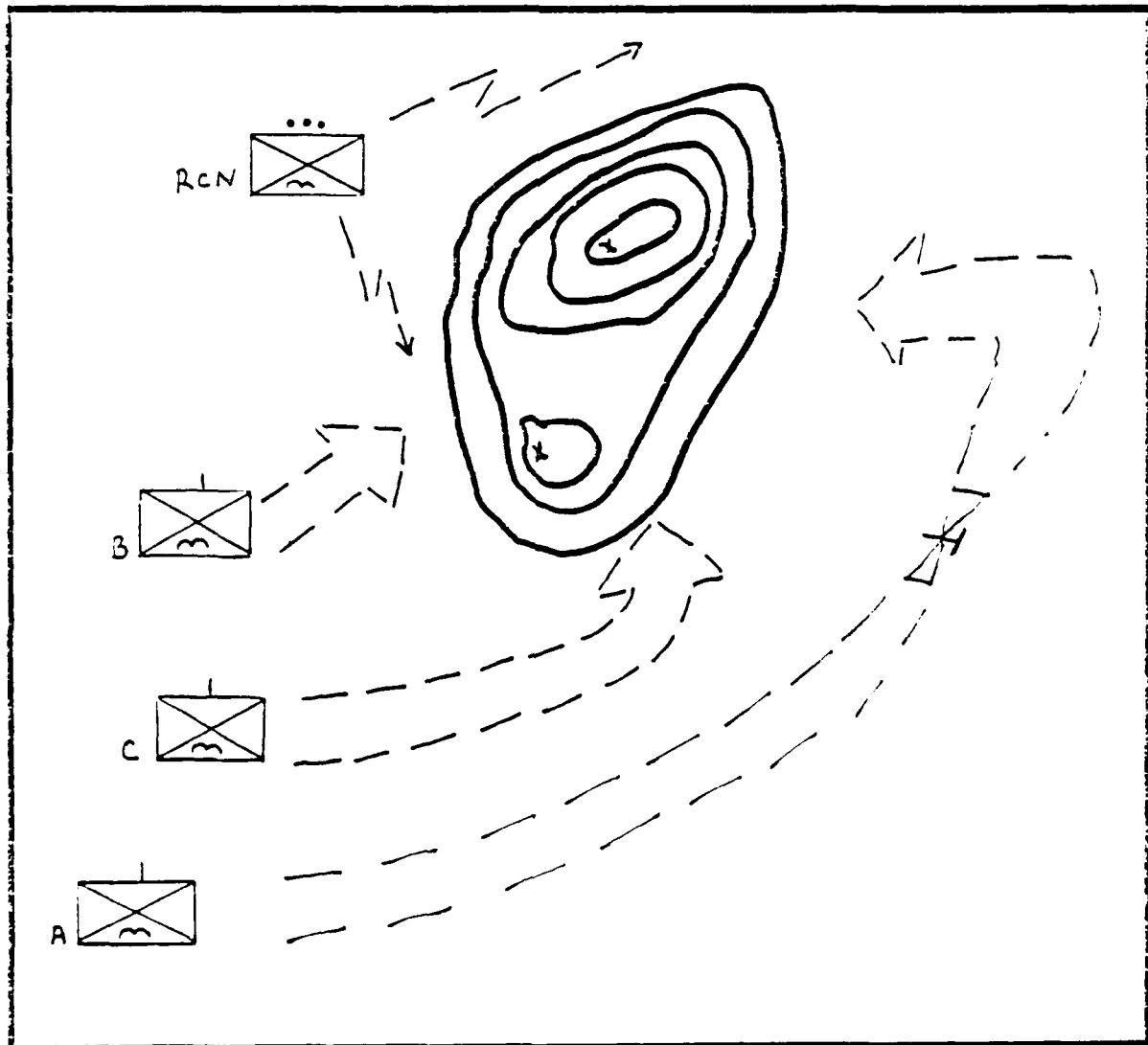
The adoption of one or all of these suggested actions would do much to provide the division the organic capability to conduct counterinsurgency operations. The LID must depend upon superior tactics and leadership to overcome its shortages of firepower and tactical mobility. To achieve this, it must be supported by a superior intelligence gathering capability that is geared to the environment in which it operates. As the U.S. Army readies its light forces to meet potential low-intensity warfare challenges worldwide, it would do well to learn from its experiences in Southeast Asia. Effective tactical reconnaissance is a prerequisite for tactical success on the counterinsurgency battlefield. On the counterinsurgency battlefield, the force structure of the division can afford to be "light" with regard to weapons and equipment only if it is "heavy" with regard to tactical reconnaissance capability.



Map 1. Movement C/2-8 Inf 28 Oct 1966



Map 2. Situation 0250, 29 Oct 1966 C/2-8 Inf



Map 3. 2-502d Inf Plan of attack - Phong Cao, RVN

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11. The concept of a neutral population was taken from a lecture delivered by Dr. Robert Epstein to a combined SAMS seminar, USACGSC, Ft Leavenworth, Kansas, October 1987.
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